

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LIBREV 02272 211635Z
ACTION OES-09

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SPOP
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S ROLE IN DEALING WITH PRESSING GLOBAL PROBLEMS--
POPULATION/FOOD PRODUCTION

REF: (A) STATE 207555 (STATE 107370), (B) STATE 201287,
(C) LIBREVILLE 1883

1. SINCE REFTEL (A) RECEIVED AT THIS POST ONLY ON AUG 17,
AND IN VIEW DEADLINE REFTEL (B), I WILL HAVE HAD NO OPPOR-
TUNITY ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIP REQUESTED RE NEED FOR GABON
"DEAL MORE EFFECTIVELY" WITH POPULATION/FOOD PROBLEMS IN
ORDER MEET BASIC NEEDS OF POOR THROUGH SELF-HELP MEASURES.
FOLLOWING THEREFORE REPRESENTS ONLY MY COMMENTS ON SUBJECT
AS THEY APPLY TO GABON.

2. DEPARTMENT MAY WISH REFER TO MY 1883, WHICH DISCUSSED
PROBLEM IN DIFFERENT CONTEXT. AS THAT MESSAGE INDICATES,
I WOULD VENTURE SUGGEST THAT GABON IS SPECIAL CASE THAT
DOES NOT FIT NORMAL PATTERN OF RAPID POPULATION GROWTH
AND INADEQUATE FOOD PRODUCTION, AND BECAUSE IT DOES NOT YET
QUESTION UTILITY OR EVEN WISDOM OF ATTEMPTING ESTABLISH
ANY MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE WITH GABONESE ON THESE SUBJECTS.
THUS:

A. GABON IS APPROX SIZE OF STATE OF COLORADO. TOTAL
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PAGE 02 LIBREV 02272 211635Z

ESTIMATED POPULATION VARIES BETWEEN 550,000 AND ONE
MILLION GABONESE (WE CONSIDER LOWER FIGURE AS MORE
ACCURATE), OR LITTLE MORE THAN CITY OF DENVER.

B. AVERAGE ANNUAL POPULATION GROWTH IS 1.7 PERCENT,
ONE OF LOWEST IN DEVELOPING WORLD, AND CERTAINLY IN
AFRICA.

C. GABON MUST THEREFORE IMPORT LABOR AND HAS CON-

VENTION WITH NUMBER OF OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES, (E.G., TOGO, BENIN, RWANDA) FOR THIS PURPOSE.

D. GABON IS APPROX 85 PERCENT HEAVILY FORESTED AND HAS VIRTUALLY NO AGRICULTURAL TRADITION.

D. GABON IMPORTS APPROX 90 PERCENT OF ITS FOOD REQUIREMENTS, PRINCIPALLY FOR DISTRIBUTION IN CITIES. RURAL POPULATION DOES ENGAGEHLN SUBSISTENCE FARMING AND IS GENERALLY SELF-SUDRICIENT IN FOOD. THEY PRODUCE LITTLE FOR URBAN POPULATION.

F. SUITABLE LAND FOR AGRICULTURE OTHER THAN FOR SUBSISTENCE EXISTS ONLY IN EAST, IN SOME PARTS OF NORTH AND IN SOME PARTS OF ALMOST INACCESSIBLE SOUTH, ALL OF WHICH LONG WAY FROM URBAN CENTERS AND REACHABLE ONLY BY AIR OR BY LIMITED NUMBER OF POOR ROADS.

G. GABON NONETHELESS RECOGNIZES ITS AGRICULTURAL DEFICIENCIES AND HAS MADE AGRICULTURE PRINCIPAL PRIORITY OF ITS THIRD DEVELOPMENT PLAN (1976-1980).

H. GABON'S WEALTH LIES IN URANIUM, OIL, MANGANESE AND TIMBER (WITH IRON ORE WAITING IN WINGS). EARNINGS FROM THESE RAW MATERIALS GIVE GABON HIGHEST PER CAPITA INCOME IN AFRICA AFTER LIBYA (APPROX DOLS 3000).

I. SUBSTANTIAL PART OF EARNING ARE REINVESTED IN DESPERATELY NEEDED SURFACE TRANSPORTATION TO ENABLE INCREASED EXPLOITATION OF RAW MATERIALS AND TO CONNECT POTENTIAL AGRICULTURAL AREAD TO URBAN CENTERS. PRINCIPAL PROJECT IS TRANS GABON RAILWAYS WHICH COSTLY AND WILL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 LIBREV 02272 211635Z

NOT BE COMPLETED UNTIL WELL INTO EIGHTIES (IT IS BEING FUNDED BY GABONESE).

J. MEANWHILE, GABON IS IN PERIOD OF AUSTERITY AS RESULT OVER-SPENDING ON INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN (1976 AND 1977. RESULT IS DECREASE IN CURRENT LEVEL OF INVESTMENT, WHICH WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY IMPACT ON INTENTION TO IMPROVE AGRICULTURE PER SE, SINCE AVAILABLE FUNDS WILL GO PRIMARILY TO TRANS GABON RAILWAY. SITUATION MAY LAST FOR ANOTHER TWO-THREE YEARS.

K. THE UNITED STATES, CONSTRAINED BY CONGRESS FROM ENTERING INTO ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS WITH (A) OPEC COUNTRIES, AND (B) COUNTRIES WITH AVERAGE PER CAPITA INCOME OF MORE THAN DOLS 1000, HAS NO AID PROGRAM IN GABON. WE CAN ONLY OFFER THEM AID ON REIMBURSABLE BASIS, WHICH THEY UNLIKELY TAKE UP DURING PRESENT TIME OF AUSTERITY.

3. SITUATION SUMMED UP THEREFORE IS THAT GABON, A VERY UNDERPOPULATED COUNTRY, HAS ABSOLUTELY NO DESIRE TO CONTROL POPULATION GROWTH, WHICH ALREADY RELATIVELY LOW. QUITE THE REVERSE, THEY WOULD MUCH PREFER NOT HAVING TO RELY ON IMPORTED LABOR. AT PRESENT, VAST AREAS OF GABON ARE ALMOST ENTIRELY DEVOID OF ANY POPULATION. GABON IS

WELL AWARE OF NEED FOR IMPROVED AGRICULTURE, PARTLY TO AVOID HIGH IMPORT BILL AND RELATED INFLATION, AND PARTLY TO TRY AND DIVERSIFY ITS ECONOMY. IT FACES ENORMOUS PROBLEMS OF INACCESSIBILITY, LACK OF MANPOWER, LACK OF AGRICULTURAL TRADITION AND POOR TRANSPORTATION INFRA-STRUCTURE (EXCEPT COSTLY AIR TRANSPORT), AND IT WILL TAKE LONG TIME IN OUR JUDGEMENT BEFORE AGRICULTURE IS SIGNIFICANT SECTOR OF ECONOMY. GABON'S PRINCIPAL ANSWER IS TO OPEN UP COUNTRY WITH TRANS GABON RAILWAY, BUT EVERY PENNY DIVERTED FROM INVESTMENT IN RAILWAY TO OTHER PROJECTS, WHETHER FOR BASIC HUMAN NEEDS OR NOT, MEANS THAT IT WILL BE JUST THAT MUCH LONGER BEFORE RAILWAY IS FINISHED. (BUDGET, OF COURSE, DOES PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR BASIC HUMAN NEEDS NOW). WE IN MEANTIME CAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 LIBREV 02272 211635Z

OFFER THEM NO HELP AT ALL, EXCEPT FOR WHAT THEY CAN PAY FOR.

4. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WHILE THERE NO QUESTION THAT GABON IS FOOD DEFICIT COUNTRY, DIALOGUE SUGGESTED REFTEL WOULD IN MY JUDGEMENT BE ESSENTIALLY MEANINGLESS. GABONESE NO DOUBT WOULD RECOGNIZE PHILOSOPHICALLY NEED FOR COOPERATION OF THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES, AND THAT WORLD-WIDE PROBLEM LINKING FOOD PRODUCTION AND POPULATION GROWTH EXISTS, BUT WOULD LOOK VERY STRANGELY AT ANYONE WHO ATTEMPTED SUGGEST REDUCING THEIR POPULATION GROWTH. RE AGRICULTURE ALONE, THE FULL AWARE OF NEED TO DEVELOP AGRICULTURAL SECTOR, BUT WOULD LEGITIMATELY WONDER WHY I, HAVING NOTHING TO OFFER THENFN RAISED SUBJECT AT ALL, EXCEPT IN GENERALIZED TERMS OF SHOWING INTEREST IN GABONESE DEVELOPMENT AND EXPRESSING HOPE THEY WILL FIND ENOUGH RESOURCES TO MAKE REAL PROGRESS ON THEIR OWN. EVEN THEN IF GABONESE WER TO CONCLUDE THAT WHAT I WAS REALLY GETTING AT WAS SUGGESTION THAT THEY DIVERT RESOURCES FROM TRANS GABON RAILWAY TO BASIC HUMAN NEEDS, I COULD EXPECT NEGATIVE REACTION, SINCE RAILWAY IS THEIR ANSWER TO RESOLVING PRECISELY THAT PROBLEM.

5. IF THERE COMES TIME WHEN THERE IS RELAXATION OF OUR OWN ARBITRARY RESTRICTION ON PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO COUNTRIES SUCH AS GABON, THUS ENABLING US "TO COOPERATE JOINTLY," I COULD FORESEE A POTENTIALLY FRUITFUL DIALOGUE ON WAYS AND MEANS IMPROVE GABONESE AGRICULTURE. I DO NOT, HOWEVER, ENVISAGE TIME WHEN IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO COUPLE SUCH DISCUSSION WITH SUGGESTIONS THAT THEY REDUCE POPULATION GROWTH, AND DO NOT BELIEVE IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS TO DO SO. TIENKEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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